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SUBJECT: THE DPP ON THE DEFENSIVE NINE WEEKS BEFORE
YEAR-END LOCAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: With just nine weeks remaining before Taiwan's December 3 county magistrate/city mayor elections, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is on the defensive because of criticism over scandals and lackluster government performance. DPP candidates are trying to compensate for the party's credibility deficit by focusing their campaigns on their own individual records and voter appeal. The "Three Kings and One Queen" (Premier Frank Hsieh, DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang, Presidential Secretary General Yu Shyi-kun, and Vice President Annette Lu) are stumping for candidates with no apparent coordination, generating speculation they are using the year-end elections to position themselves for the 2008 presidential race. Meanwhile, President Chen Shui-bian and other DPP leaders have been hurling criticisms at new Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou in an apparent attempt to stem Ma's surging popularity, the so-called "Ma Ying-jeou effect," which may have long coattails in the December elections. End Summary.

Taipei County is the Key Race

[12.](#) (C) The DPP currently governs ten (eight counties and two cities) of the 23 jurisdictions (18 counties and 5 cities) being contested on December 3. (Note: The mayoral elections for the two national level municipalities - Taipei City and Kaohsiung City - will be held in December, 2006. End Note.) The DPP is the ruling party in the counties of Taipei, Ilan, Nantou, Changhua, Chiayi, Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Pingtung, and the cities of Chiayi and Tainan. In recent weeks, some DPP officials have stressed the importance of the party retaining power in Taipei, Ilan, and Pingtung Counties - Taipei because of its large population; Ilan and Pingtung because they are the hometowns of many DPP leaders.

[13.](#) (C) The key election for both the DPP and KMT is Taipei County, whose population exceeds that of Taipei City (3.7 million to 2.6 million in 2000). Many political operatives and analysts view Taipei County as pivotal to the election results. One political analyst told AIT that the DPP must win Taipei County to avoid being labeled the overall loser of the December 3 elections, while the KMT must win to claim overall election victory. At this early stage, the Taipei County race remains too close to call, with leadership in public opinion polls seesawing back and forth between the DPP's Luo Wen-jia and the KMT's Chou Hsi-wei. Wu Hsiang-jung, Deputy Director of the DPP Policy Research and Coordinating Committee, told AIT that the DPP might lose Ilan County in addition to an increasingly likely defeat in Chiayi City. Balancing possible losses, the DPP may pick up Yunlin County and possibly even Penghu County. Races in Miaoli and Nantou Counties, he continued, are also close at this point. The DPP may have problems in tight elections, Wu explained, because the party's current high level of voter dissatisfaction saddles the party's candidates with an initial vote deficit that they must overcome by relying on their own individual record and voter appeal. So negative do some DPP candidates view the DPP's image public image that they do not want party leaders to visit their counties or cities to campaign on their behalf, fearing this will cost rather than win votes.

A Credibility Gap

[14.](#) (C) Since last April, Wu told AIT, public support for the DPP, as indicated by the party's internal polling, has declined significantly due to scandals, poor government performance, and constant criticism in the media. Charges of corruption have been especially damaging to the party's erstwhile clean government image. Recently, the press has highlighted a series of alleged ruling government blunders. One involved DPP candidate for Taichung City Mayor and former Government Information Office (GIO) Director Lin Jia-lung, who was accused of not following proper government auditing procedure and thus causing a delay in distributing the tsunami relief aid that the GIO had collected while Lin was

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its Director. While no one has accused Lin of financial malfeasance, he has been widely portrayed as careless and incompetent. Lin is currently trailing his KMT opponent, the popular KMT Mayor of Taichung Jason Hu, by 30 percentage points in public opinion polls. When asked whether the DPP has an election campaign strategy to counter this and other alleged missteps, DPP Party Chairman Su Tseng-chang predicted that voters will be understanding, and said that the DPP will try to convince them that it is a glorious act to support the party.⁸ Wu was far less optimistic about Lin's chances.

15. (C) Just as the GIO tsunami relief fund scandal and the violent riots by Thai laborers in Kaohsiung last month were fading from the front pages, another controversy involving the ruling party attracted island-wide attention. The press reported that the Examination Yuan (EY) used one of President Chen Shui-bian's speeches as a test subject in a Senior Civil Examination for Lawyers administered by the Examination Yuan (EY) in late August. This caused a large public outcry and opposition charges that the civil examination had degenerated into a propaganda tool of the DPP. Examination Yuan President Yao Chia-wen, a "deep Green" independence fundamentalist, insisted to AIT that the EY leadership had nothing to do with the selection of test questions, which had been done solely by academic testing specialists. DPP Caucus General Secretary Chen Chin-chun awkwardly defended the Examination Yuan's action by arguing that these kinds of things happened frequently during the reign of Chiang Kai-shek . . . therefore, the opposition should not make a fuss with trifles.⁸ Chen's remarks created more public criticism of the ruling DPP, with many commentators and opposition politicians charging that the DPP has replaced its original identity as the party of reform and honest government with a "stodgy culture" that wastes taxpayers' money on the visits of high ranking officials. The NT \$16.5 million (USD 550,000) temporary bridge constructed for President Chen and Premier Frank Hsieh's inspection of the Hsuehshan Tunnel in late August caused a public outcry and government officials scrambled to defend the bridge, a defense that came back to haunt the ruling party when highway engineers demolished the bridge last week. The furor over what critics called the "currying favor" (ma-pi) bridge forced President Chen to cancel a visit to an air force base in Hsinchu County after soldiers complained to the media that they were barred from taking leave in order to rehearse for the President's visit.

Where is President Chan Shui-bian?

16. (SBU) Although the DPP is on the defensive, President Chen Shui-bian has tried recently to stay above the fray. Rather than respond to criticism, he has chosen to engage Ma Ying-jeou, whose popularity has continued to rise following his election as KMT chairman last July. Ma's public support rating stands at 65 percent according to a recent TVBS news channel poll, up five percent from a similar survey in May.

17. (SBU) In an apparent attempt to divert attention from the DPP's troubles and stem the new KMT leader's surging popularity, President Chen publicly challenged Ma to: abandon the KMT's "one China" mythology and relate to contemporary Taiwan; cease KMT opposition tactics so that cross-Straits peace can move forward; and face up to the KMT party assets controversy and recompense Taiwan society. If Ma will lead the KMT in these directions, Chen stated, this will build a unified Taiwan better able to resist China's annexationist ambitions. Ma politely thanked Chen for his suggestions but stated that he will not respond to similar messages via the media in the future.

18. (SBU) Other DPP leaders apparently hope to use the current election campaigns to generate momentum for their own runs for the presidency in 2008. In late August, Vice President Annette Lu and DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang held separate meetings with local party directors to prepare for the year-end elections. Lu issued her invitation independently and without notifying Chairman Su's office, which triggered speculation that she was trying to strengthen support for herself among local constituencies, since organizing the year-end elections is Su's responsibility, not hers.

Comment

19. (C) Negative publicity is forcing DPP party and government officials to spend valuable time and political capital on damage control rather than focusing on the upcoming elections. This is cause for concern among some senior DPP officials, a number of whom, from "deep Green" independence fundamentalist Yao Chia-wen to moderate New Tide faction member and DPP Deputy Secretary General Yan Wan-chin, have lamented to AIT the rising dissatisfaction with the DPP because of the series of embarrassing incidents verging on

scandals. After a recent KMT Central Standing Committee meeting, incumbent DPP Chiayi County Magistrate Chen Ming-wen reportedly told his colleagues that Ma Ying-jeou's winning the KMT chairmanship has given KMT grassroots supporters a huge lift in morale, and is having a "serious negative impact⁸ on DPP chances in many closely contested elections, such as Chiayi. Stating the DPP is in an emergency situation in Chiayi," Chen urged DPP leaders to formulate a careful and comprehensive response to surge in KMT popularity under Ma before it is too late. Natives of neighboring Tainan, including Yan Wan-chin and NSC Deputy Secretary General Paris Chang (Hsu-cheng) have told AIT of their surprise at finding support for the DPP in their hometown so low. DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang acknowledged to the press that DPP supporters have grown silent and are reluctant to admit affiliation with the party. As a remedy, Su said, the party needs to discuss how to reawake voters, passion toward the DPP. This may be easier said than done. As two senior journalists working for pro-DPP media organizations told AIT: &How can one become passionate if there is nothing to be passionate about?⁸

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